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THE ORIGIN OF THE WORSHIP OF YAHWE

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According to the biblical account, the name Yahwe, or Yahu, had its origin in the vision of Moses at the burning bush. He asked to be told who it was that was sending him on this momentous errand, that he might tell the people, and he was told that Eh-yeh, 'I am,' was his name, which, put into the third person, is Yahwe, 'He is.' This was a sufficiently satisfactory derivation of the name and account of its origin, for those to whom the written account of Exodus was held sacred; but it has not been regarded as final by scholars. Indeed, they have observed not only that Yahwe is spoken of previously to this vision, but that proper names anterior to this, as that of the mother of Moses, are found with the name of Yahwe. To be sure that fact is not serious, for the critical view, since the names may not be historical, or might have been changed by the writer, just as Ishbaal has become Ishbosheth. It is one of the problems of students of Hebrew history to discover what was the origin of the sole worship of Yahwe.

For the appearance of a true monotheism in Palestine, among a people not of the highest culture, is one of the most remarkable, if not inexplicable facts in human history, the most tremendous for its influence on religious history. If we cannot accept the

assumption that from the creation of Adam there had been a succession of worshipers of pure monotheism, we must seek the religious source out of which came the worship of Yahwe, first as among other gods, then as a henotheistic deity, and finally as the God of monotheism ruling the universe.

In a recent essay on evolution of monotheism, the late Professor Baentsch, of Jena, has argued that inasmuch as the religions of Egypt and Babylonia were stellar religions, it was impossible that monotheism should originate with them, for were one to say, "The sun is the one God," one would reply, "Why the sun alone? Why not also the moon?" But the original worship of Palestine or Syria, he says, was not stellar, but a sort of Baal-worship which more readily developed into the recognition of one God, at least for one nation. But this is hardly a true statement of fact. The identification of the Babylonian gods with the planets was a later philosophy of the priests; and even the worship of the sun and the moon does not seem to be any older than, if as old as, the worship of Anu, god of the sky, or Bêl-Illil, god of the earth, and Ea, god of the waters. It is true that the worship of the sun under various names, and of the moon, was very early, but no earlier than that of Bêl or Ningirsu, or perhaps, Adad, and of one or two other goddesses who were later identified with Venus, even as Marduk was identified with the planet Jupiter. It would not seem any more difficult or unlikely for monotheism to originate out of these religions than in Palestine. Indeed, it did originate in Egypt, somewhat crudely under the Heretic King; and we have the approach to it in the worship in Assyria of Ashur, the solar disk, and in the worship of Ahura-Mazda under the prophet Zoroaster.

The present and most prevalent theory of the origin of the Yahwe worship is that which accepts the kernel of the biblical story, and concludes that Yahwe was the tribal god of the Hebrews in the desert, and that they found the worship of Yahwe among the Midianites or, more definitely, the Kenites, with whom Moses sojourned before the Exodus. The Kenites are supposed to have had their home in the neighborhood of Sinai, a special seat of Yahwe. We are also told that the Rechabites, who helped Jehu in

his zeal for Yahwe, were a nomad tribe of the Kenites. This is the substance of the evidence that the Kenites worshiped Yahwe, and that the Hebrews, while wandering in the desert, learned the Yahwe worship. It may be confessed that it is a very shadowy kind of evidence, for we have not a particle of historical or epigraphic evidence that the Kenite or any other Midianite tribelet was a worshiper of Yahwe.

It is now generally admitted that the Hebrews who entered from the desert found closely allied tribes who had long lived on the borders of Canaan, and had never been in Egypt. It is to be presumed that they worshiped the gods of the land; and the stories of the Book of Judges, and particularly that of Micah and his ephod and teraphim and molten images carried to Dan by the Danites, are evidence that the Hebrews of that period worshiped the gods of the land. That there was also the worship of Yahwe, the writer would assure us; but certainly if such was the case, it was not as the one and only god ruling over the world or even over Canaan.

On the face of the historical facts known to us, it would be likely that the worship of Yahwe grew out of that of some one of the deities general to the worship of the region. We are not to think of the time when the Hebrew people emerged into history as a time when tribes or nations were isolated one from another, each with its own god, or gods, having no relation to those of other nations or tribes. It was a time of long and thorough mingling of races and influences, through both trade and war. The Tel-el-Amarna tablets show us definitely how thoroughly Palestine was overrun and its civilization and worship modified by, and assimilated to, those of Egypt on the one hand, and of Babylonia and the intervening countries to the north and east, especially of the Hittite empire. What we learn from this source we also learn from the art of the time, as found on occasional bas-reliefs, and on the more numerous seal cylinders with their figures of gods.

The Egyptian religion was never imposed on Syria and Palestine. To be sure there was a temporary military control, but for the most part it came late with the Eighteenth Dynasty, and ended in

the Nineteenth; and while elements were then introduced into the art, such as the frequent use of the *crux ansata*, and occasionally figures of one or more Egyptian gods, and not a few Egyptian scarabs are found in Syria, yet the prevailing influence was not that of the invaders and temporary conquerors, but rather of the more permanent Asiatic neighbors, as we judge from the blending of the art of the period, mostly of cylinder seals, not a few of which have been excavated in the Hauran and elsewhere. And it is just this Hauran region that particularly interests us for the religion of the period at or before the Exodus; for out of the Hauran the Hebrews passed over into Canaan.

For a study of the earliest character of the Yahwe worship we are driven to but a single source, that of the indications of it that remain in the Hebrew literature. We must consider in what figurative way the people had continued to represent to themselves their national God. Some of the ideas and expressions under which they pictured Yahwe to themselves are likely to have come down from a primitive source, while other expressions will have come in later. I regard that pictorial form which we now and then find by which Yahwe is represented with wings, as of a comparatively later period, that is, as having arisen considerably after the Exodus; because such expressions as "under the shadow of thy wings," "healing in his wings," have in view the figure of the winged solar disk. This design was modified from the Egyptian solar disk by the omission of the asps, and did not come into use in Syria until, I think, considerably later than the conquest of Syria by Egypt and the Nineteenth Dynasty. This biblical representation of Yahwe is peculiar and quite apart from others, and is to be dismissed from our discussion.

The following are the more general and special descriptions or attributes of Yahwe which seem to have come down from a primitive source. In the first place, he is a god of the mountains. So he is represented at Sinai and Horeb, and also often elsewhere. Abraham went to Moriah to sacrifice Isaac in the story which relates itself to the killing of the first-born. Elijah goes to Mount Carmel to contend with the priests of Baal, and later flees to Horeb, the Mount of God. The theophanies are related naturally

to mountains. "God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran." We seem to have the definite statement that such was the view of Yahwe in the story of the defeat of the soldiers of Benhadad by those of Ahab. His advisers explained his defeat to the Syrian king by saying, "Their God is a god of the hills, but he is not a god of the valleys." Historically and figuratively he was a deity of the mountains.

The next point to observe is that he was particularly a god of storms, thunder, and lightning. This relates itself to the mountains which are the scenes of storm. So he appeared to Moses in Sinai, and to Elijah at Horeb. In the earliest bit of Hebrew literature that has come down to us we read:

Yahwe, when thou wentest forth out of Seir,
When thou marchedst out of the field of Edom,
The earth trembled, the heavens also dropt,
Yea the clouds dropt water,
The mountains flowed down at the presence of Yahwe,
Even yon Sinai, at the presence of Yahwe, the God of Israel.

In the book of Job, in which the name of Yahwe is avoided, and El Shaddai so often takes its place, the name which we are told was the earlier name of Yahwe, God twice (38:1; 40:6) addresses Job from the whirlwind, even as Elijah was taken up into heaven in a whirlwind; and in 36:26-37 Elihu gives a long description of God as the ruler of lightning, storm, and rain. Indeed, it was the lightning and the tempest, and also the hosts of the Sabeans and Chaldeans, by which the wealth of Job was destroyed. Amos begins his prophecy (1:2): "Yahwe shall roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the pastures of the shepherds shall moan, and the top of Carmel shall wither." In 4:13 he it is that "formeth the mountains and created the wind," "that maketh the morning darkness and treadeth upon the high places of the earth," a God of both mountain and storm.

Again we have the mountain and the storm in the theophany of Micah 1:3, 4:

Behold the Lord cometh forth out of his place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, as waters that are poured down a steep place.

Nahum's prophecy begins with a similar theophany:

The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers; Bashan languisheth and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. The mountains quake at him and the hills melt; and the earth is upheaved at his presence. Yea, the world and all that dwell therein. . . . His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken asunder by him (1:3-6).

Habakkuk's theophany (3:3-13) develops the picture of storm, lightning, thunder, and earthquake, when Yahwe went forth to victory, "with the "light of his arrows" and "the shining of his glittering spears," when "fiery bolts went forth at his feet."

And yet it is in the Psalms that we have the most numerous descriptions of Yahwe as God of storm, lightning, and rain. It is sufficient to call attention to Pss. 7:12, 13; 11:6; 18:6-15; 29:3-10; 48:7; 50:3; 65:5-13; 68:7-17, 33; 81:7; 83:15; 93:1-4; 97:3-5; 104:1-13, 32; 107:33-37; 147:15-18. Of these we may specify Ps. 29 which is entirely devoted to a description of thunder as "the voice of Yahwe."

Closely allied to the representation of Yahwe as the God of thunder and storm is that which makes him a fighting God, a God of battles. The lightnings are weapons; they are "arrows" and "glittering spears" with which he confronts his enemies and those of his people. Accordingly one of the most common attributes given to him is that of "God of hosts," that is "God of the armies of Israel," I Sam. 17:45, not of the host of heaven which is **צבא**, not **צבאות**. In the song of Moses, Exod. 15:3 we are told:

Yahwe is a man of war;
Yahwe is his name.

It was by the strong east wind that the waters had been driven away that the children of Israel might cross the Red Sea, and it was the return of Yahwe's wind that overwhelmed the Egyptians.

Thou didst blow with thy wind; the sea covered them;
They sank as lead in the mighty waters—
Who is like unto thee, Yahwe, among the gods? (vs. 10).

Another of the more important indications as to the origin of the worship of Yahwe is to be found in the way he was represented

in art. We are told that when Moses delayed to come down from the mount Aaron made a golden "calf," that is, a young bull עֵבֶל, which represented their god to the people. Then, in some way the bull was the symbol of the god they worshiped. Also when Jereboam separated from the Southern Kingdom, in order to prevent the people from resorting to Jerusalem to worship Yahwe, he set up shrines in Bethel and Dan, and represented Yahwe by golden "calves." Whether the earliest worship at Dan with an image, ephod, and teraphim was with a calf we do not know. But the fact of the worship of the bull at Bethel and Dan is again and again substantiated in the denunciations of the prophets, especially in Hosea and Amos. In Hos. 13:2 we learn that the kissing of the calf was an act of worship. In Hos. 8:5, 6 the "calf of Samaria" is mentioned. It is generally recognized that the bull must have been from the earliest times related to the popular worship; and that the bull-god was supposed to have brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, and the representation by a bull could not have been derived from an Egyptian god, but belonged to an Asianic type of worship. We are not told what was the form of the "graven image and molten image" which, with the ephod and teraphim, were stolen by the Danites from the house of Micah and taken to Dan (Judges, chaps. 18 and 19); but from the fact that Dan was later the seat of worship of the calf it is likely that this was a bull. The 1,700 shekels of gold with which Gideon made an ephod in Ophrah in the land of Manasseh, which became a snare to Gideon and his house," must have gone for an image also, but we are not told what was its nature.

These facts are patent in the story as to the figuration or symbolic worship of Yahwe: He was a god of mountains; he was a god of lightning, thunder, storm, and rain, and so necessarily a god of war, a god of armies who led the Israelites to battle; and he was figured as a bull. These are our data; and it is now our duty to see how these attributes agree with those of any of the gods of the region.

We have no satisfactory figures of an early time of the gods of Phoenicia or Palestine which would sufficiently identify them. In Egyptian monuments Resheph is figured as a Syrian deity. But

we know from a multitude of seals of which a number are known to have come from the Hauran or other neighboring regions, what were the gods worshiped. They are, whatever their names, prin-



FIG. 1.—J. Pierpont Morgan Library.

FIG. 2.—Lajard's *Culte de Mithra*, XXVII, 1.

cipally three (and are all seen in the seal cylinder, Fig. 1), a dignified standing deity usually with no weapon, the god to the left in Fig. 1; a more active and militant deity as the one to the right in the same figure; and a goddess, who stands between them. These were worshiped under various names from the Tigris to the Mediterranean, and apparently for many centuries beginning back even of the Twelfth Dynasty of Egypt, that is, long before the Exodus from Egypt. It is the second militant god whom I would compare with the primitive Yahwe or Yahu, or Yah.

This deity was known under various names, but is the same under whatever name. He is Adad or Addu, or Ramman or Rimmon, under the Babylonians, Assyrians, and in Damascus.



FIG. 3.—Bibliothèque Nationale.



FIG. 4.—J. Pierpont Morgan Library.

He is Teshub among the Hittites and kindred peoples, and he was the Resheph of Humath. Whether he was one or more of the local Baals, or whether he was Moloch is by no means certain. He was also identified for his militant character, with the Egyptian Set or Sutekh.

It has been said that Yahwe is described as god of mountains, as the god of thunder, lightning, rain, and storm, and so a fighting deity; and that as an idol he was represented by the bull. These characteristics unite in Ramman-Adad-Teshub and in no other deity.

In the first place he is the god of the mountains. So he is characteristically represented in Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4. He stands or walks on mountains as his regular home. In the language of Micah, he "treads on the high places of the earth." This does not resemble the cases in which in early Babylonian art we see the rising sun Shamash coming out of the gates of the east and stepping on a mountain, or lifting himself up between two mountains by his hands, to indicate the rising of the sun, for they are Adad's



FIG. 5.—J. Pierpont Morgan Library.



FIG. 6.—British Museum.

regular abode, as Olympus was the abode of the Hellenic deities, and particularly of Zeus, the god who wields the thunderbolt, and who is most closely related to Adad-Ramman.

Adad-Ramman also was the god of thunder, lightning, wind, and rain. This appears frequently in the Babylonian inscriptions, for he is a western god imported into Babylonia at an early period. As a single example we may refer to the curse on the boundary stones asked for from him, praying that the harvests of any violator may be washed away. The derivation of Ramman is supposed to be from *ramâmu*, to bellow, to thunder, and we find such expressions as that of "Ramman thundered in the heavens." In a tablet giving the titles of the gods we have the following titles of Adad: "God of clouds; god of the storm cloud; god of earthquake (?); god of thunder; god of lightning; god of inundation; god of rain; god of storm; god of the Deluge." The latter, *abûbu* is the great Deluge, which we learn from Genesis

was brought upon the earth by Yahwe. We also learn that under the names Sumukan, Martu, and Amurru, Adad was recognized as "god of lightning" and "god of mountains" (B. M., *Cuneiform Texts*, Part XXIV, pp. 7, 8). In Babylonian art he is represented as carrying a thunderbolt (see Figs. 5, 6), and not infrequently the bident or trident thunderbolt appears alone as his emblem (Fig. 9), and, occasionally, is placed above his ashera. In the Syro-Hittite art the thunderbolt is not known, but various other weapons appear, as in the biblical descriptions of Yahwe. So in Figs. 1, 2, 4, 7, 8.

Equally, and naturally, he is a god of war. The thunderbolt is itself a weapon, and Adad carries the weapons, the bow and the



FIG. 7.—Berlin Museum.



FIG. 8.—J. Pierpont Morgan Library.

club and the ax. He is in the act of war in Fig. 3, swinging a foe by the hair of his head.

There remains to be considered the bull which was the animal emblem of Yahwe. But the bull is the special animal belonging to Adad. When Adad is represented in his most complete form, as in Fig. 4, he stands on mountains, in one hand he lifts a weapon over his head and carries in the other hand a club, ax, serpent, or other weapon, and in the same hand holds a cord attached to a ring in the nose of bull. In a multitude of cases of Babylonian seals we have the thunderbolt and the bull (Figs. 5, 6), but in the case of the Syro-Hittite seals other weapons, with the bull, as in Figs. 4, 7, 8. Nor is the bull omitted in the inscriptions as the animal sacred to Adad. On the kudurru of Nazimaruttash, col. iv, 16, "the mighty bull of Adad" is appealed to. The reason why the bull belongs to him is plain; as he needs the zigzag weapon for lightning, so he needs the bull to provide him with

the bellowing of the thunder. When the exigency of art requires the omission of the figure of the god, we may have the figure of the bull with the thunderbolt above it, thus suggesting both



FIG. 9.—Metropolitan Museum.



FIG. 10.—J. Pierpont Morgan Library.

lightning and thunder, or the thunderbolt alone, as in Fig. 9. It was as the god of thunder that the Hebrews used the familiar representation of the bull, which was well known to every inhabitant of Palestine and all the region as far as Persia and Elam at the time of the emergence of the Israelite people. We have the bull alone as the emblem probably of the same god in Figs. 10, 11. As a herm ashera we see him in Fig. 12.

We thus have every one of the distinguishing marks of the early character of Yahwe in the characteristics of Adad-Ramman I cannot help believing that he was the pagan Yahwe, before Yahwe emerged as the universal god of monotheism.

If, then, we may presume that Yahwe was, in origin of worship, the god Ramman, or Adad, we get an easier explanation of one or



FIG. 11.
J. Pierpont Morgan Library.



FIG. 12.—J. Pierpont Morgan Library.

two points in Hebrew history. Not only do we find an explanation of the representation of Yahwe in the Desert and later at Bethel, and Dan by the bull, but we may see how it was that Ahaz copied the altar at Damascus. We are told, II Kings 16:10-16, that when, after Tiglath-pileser had conquered Damascus, and

Ahaz had gone to Damascus to pay homage to the Assyrian king, he saw a magnificent altar there, of which he had Urijah, the priest, make a copy in the temple at Jerusalem for the worship of Yahwe. This altar at Damascus was with little doubt an altar for the worship of Adad, and the relation of Yahwe and Adad would have made it easier for Ahaz to make such an altar for Yahwe.

Another more definite case we have in the story of Naaman. After he had been healed by Elisha of his leprosy, we are told, II Kings 5:17-19, that Naaman declared that henceforth he would worship only Yahwe, nevertheless "when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, Yahwe pardon thy servant in this thing. And he (Elisha) said unto him, Go in peace." This is a surprising concession, and may be explained if there was supposed to be any relation between the god of Damascus and the God of Israel.

As an evidence of the presence of the worship of Adad in Palestine before the entrance of the Israelites, it is to be observed that he is the principal deity of that land of whom we have evidence from the Amarna letters. One of them, No. 149, 13, extols the king of Egypt, who "lifts up his voice like Addu, so that all the land trembles at his voice," Addu being the usual and correct name for Adad, with the case-ending. There are, I think, as many proper names in those letters composed of Addu as of all other gods combined. Thus we have A-Addu, Abd-Addi, Addu-.-ia, Addu-asharidu, Addu-daian, Addu-dan, Addu-mihir, Amar-Addi, Yadi-Addi(?), Yaha-Addi, Yapahi-Addu, Yapti-Addu, Natan-Addu, Pu-Addi, Shanu-Addu, and Shipti-Addi. The evidence seems clear that he was the prevailing deity of the country. As such the Yahwe worship would be likely to come from the worship of this god.

As to the derivation of the name Yahwe, or more properly, Yahu, or Yah, I have nothing to add to the ignorance of all other scholars. Where Yahu is found in cuneiform theophorous names they are not properly Babylonian but western, if not Hebrew. Nor have I any theory to propound and defend for the derivation of El Shaddai which we are told was the earlier designation of

Yahwe; which means, I suppose, that a god Shaddai was identified with, or even became developed into, the god Yahwe. Shaddai is connected by Babylonian scholars with Shadû, mountain, which might relate it with Adad. I venture to ask the question whether, remembering the ease with which an original *shin* passes into one of the breathings in kindred languages, Shaddai may not be an earlier form of Hadad and Adad, or more easily, of the Addu of the Amarna tablets, just as we have the shaphel, hipil, and aphel conjugations, and in the personal suffixes the Babylonian -shu corresponding to the Hebrew שׁוּ and שׁ; so may we have Shaddai corresponding to Hadad (with nominative case ending, Hadadu) and Adad (Adadu) and Addu. But this I leave to the linguists.

My simple contention is that Yah, or, with the nominative termination, Yahu, or with its later development, Yahwe, or Yahweh, was one of the early tribal names under which the most popular of the Syro-Hittite gods was worshiped in the period when the Hebrews emerged into history, as he was certainly worshiped by them. I offer it as what appears to me a more probable theory than that which derives the worship from an utterly unknown god of the Kenites of Moses' time, or from the ocean-god, Ea of the Babylonians.